

Introduction

Since established by Congress in 1968, the National Institute of Justice has been instrumental in providing criminal justice practitioners and policymakers with the knowledge and tools needed to control crime and administer justice. NIJ's activities in 2003 illustrate a continuing commitment to improve criminal justice by bringing reliable science information to the field.

NIJ continued work that brings together researchers, criminal justice practitioners, and policymakers by making them equal partners in a process to identify problems, develop a strategy to address those problems, implement the strategy, measure the results, and then adjust the strategy in light of those results. The process brings the power of research out of the theoretical and onto the front lines. Several past projects have laid the groundwork for how to plan and execute researcher/practitioner partnerships and, as an example of the benefits of this knowledge, NIJ is applying the lessons learned in these efforts through research partnerships in each of the 93 Project Safe Neighborhoods sites.

NIJ has elevated the role of the practitioner in the planning stages of research as well, working to give practitioners a more active role in shaping NIJ's research agenda and in selecting the research to be funded through the peer review process, so that the fruits of the research can be relevant to the field and help policymakers make decisions informed by scientific findings.

As a better informed justice community seeks innovative approaches for controlling crime and administering justice, they need to know what works, what doesn't work, and why. To better answer this question, in 2003 NIJ created an Evaluation Division to oversee NIJ's evaluation activities. The division's mission is to improve NIJ's capacity to assess the effectiveness of criminal justice programs and

spread the word about innovations that work, as well as those that don't.

NIJ took a major step this year in maximizing the use of DNA when it completed a comprehensive report to the Attorney General on the extent of and causes for the delays in forensic DNA analysis. The report detailed six recommendations that served as the foundation of a comprehensive, national DNA initiative announced by the Attorney General on behalf of the President in March 2003.

The rapid growth of other justice-related technologies is remarkable. Much of it has been fostered with NIJ support and guidance. The NIJ standards program helps justice agencies make informed purchasing decisions about equipment needed for justice operations. The National Law Enforcement and Corrections Technology Centers system offers support, research findings, and technological expertise to help State and local law enforcement and corrections personnel perform their duties more safely and efficiently. The net effect is better informed, better equipped law enforcement and corrections agencies during a time of great technological advancement.

The power of the Internet and other electronic formats has changed how the world communicates. NIJ's electronic activities continue to harness the power of the Internet to improve communication channels with justice practitioners, researchers, and policymakers. For example, in 2003 NIJ converted to an electronic process for applicants to apply for and receive NIJ funding, created a fully searchable database of its online publication materials, and increased its use of CD-ROM's as a means of disseminating information. CD-ROM's and other dynamic electronic formats were created to share findings related to equipment for first responders, school safety, eyewitness evidence, and DNA workshops.